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(54) **HIGH SPEED OBJECT INSERTER AND RELATED METHODS**

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See application file for complete search history.

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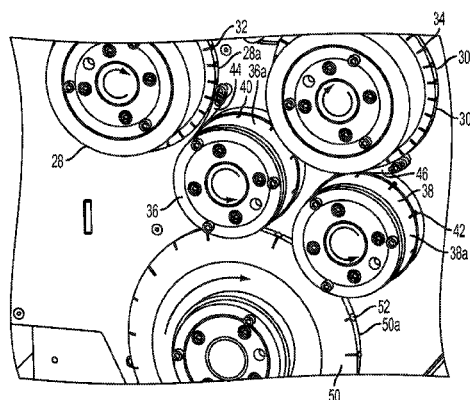
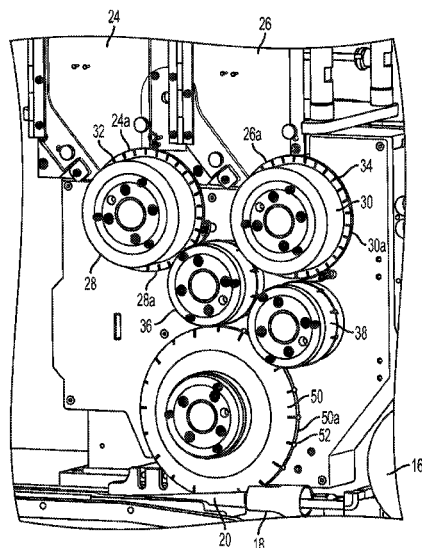
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus for inserting one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod includes at least one storage apparatus that stores a plurality of the objects, each object having a predetermined volume. At least one inserter wheel receives the objects stored in the storage apparatus, and inserts the objects into at least one band of filter material. Each of the at least one inserter wheels has an outer periphery with a plurality of pockets and distributed about the outer periphery. Each pocket has a shape configured to support one of the objects with between about one quarter and about one half of the volume of the object received in the pocket. The remainder of the object protrudes from the pocket above the outer periphery of the inserter wheel. A method of inserting one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod is also described.

**10 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets**



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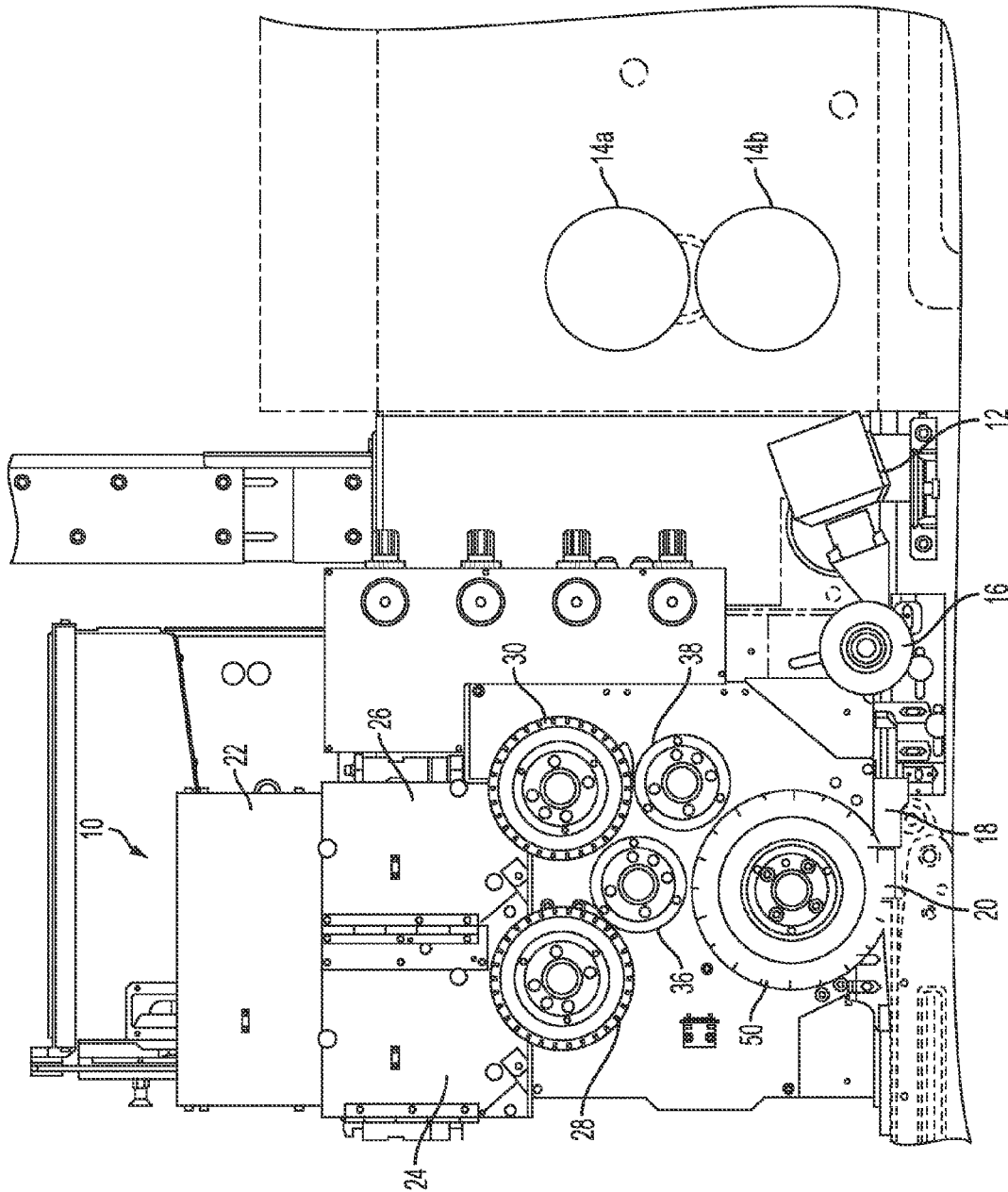


FIG. 1

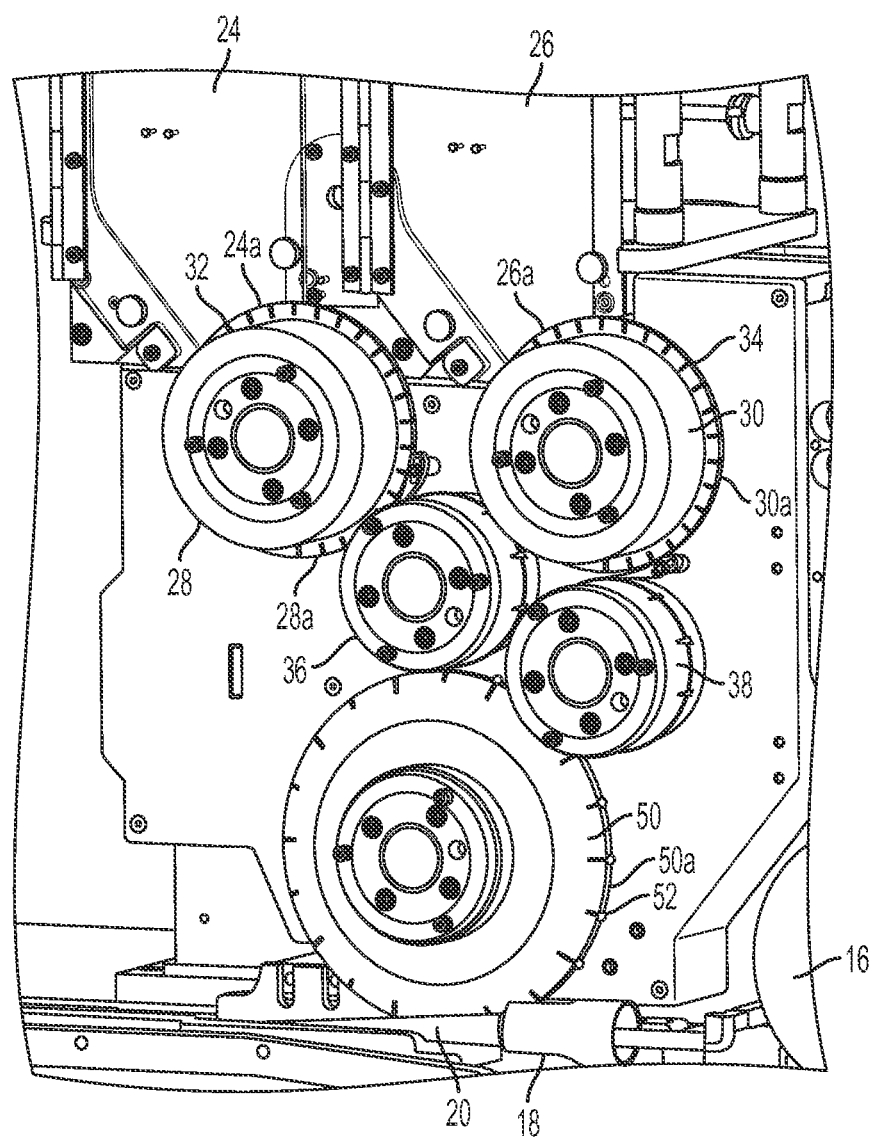


FIG. 2

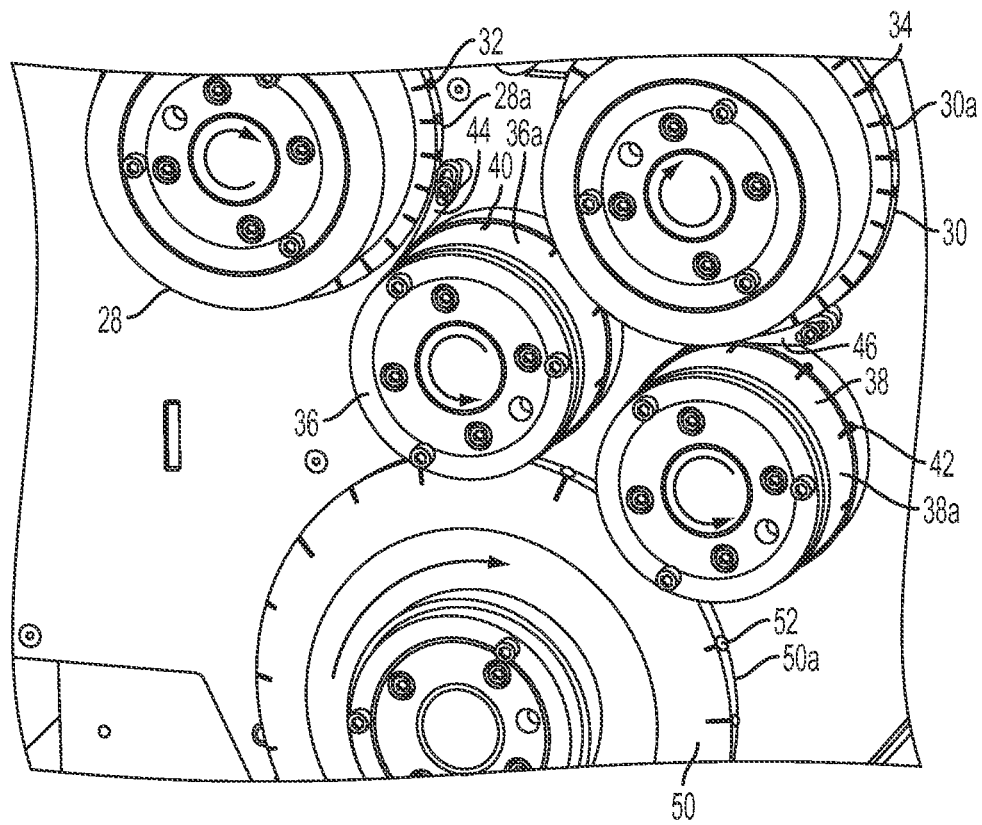


FIG. 3

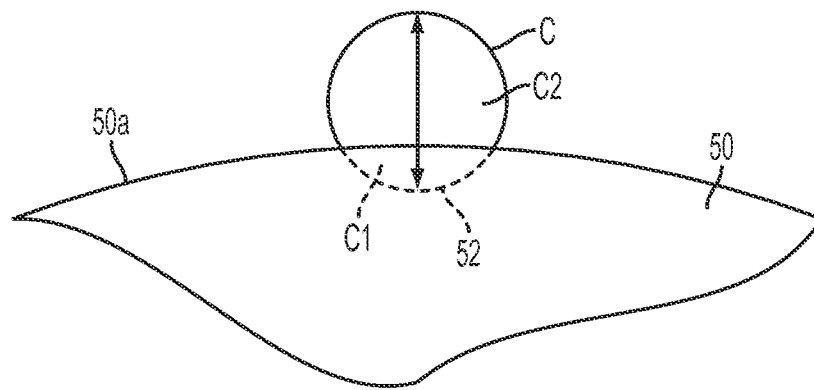


FIG. 4

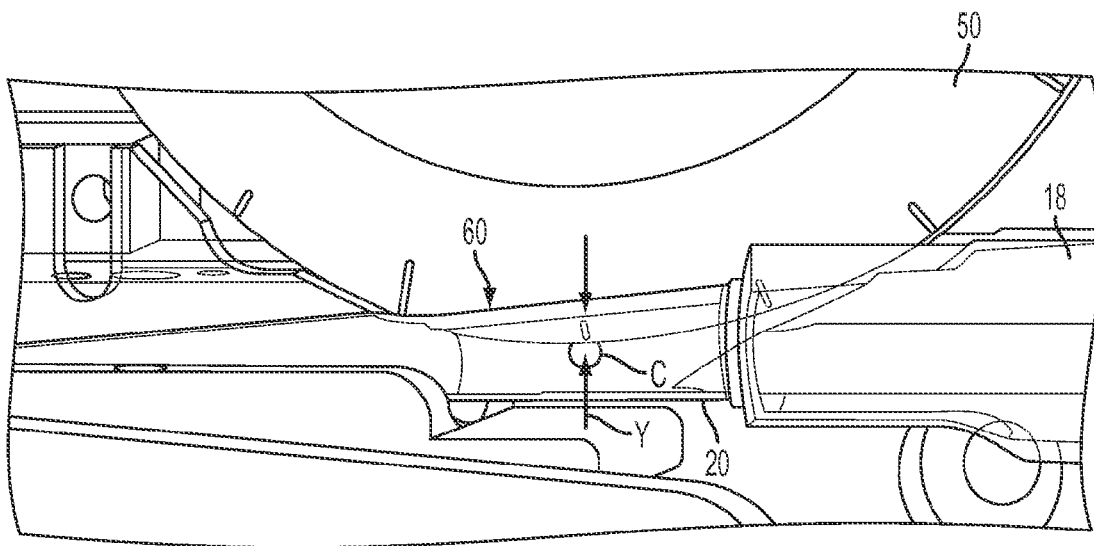


FIG. 5

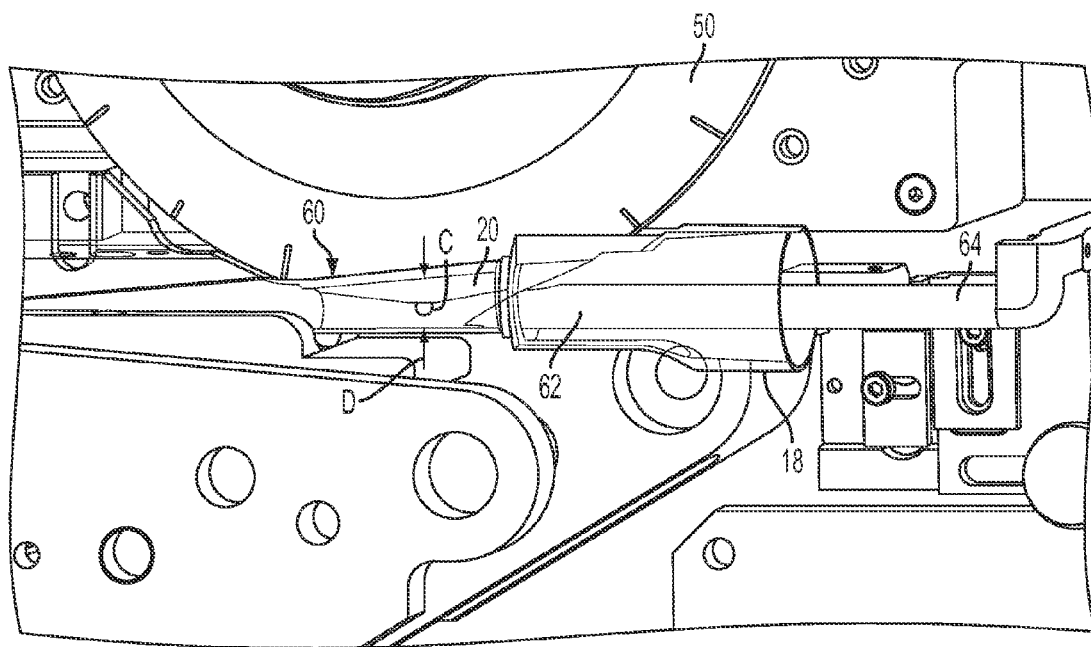


FIG. 6



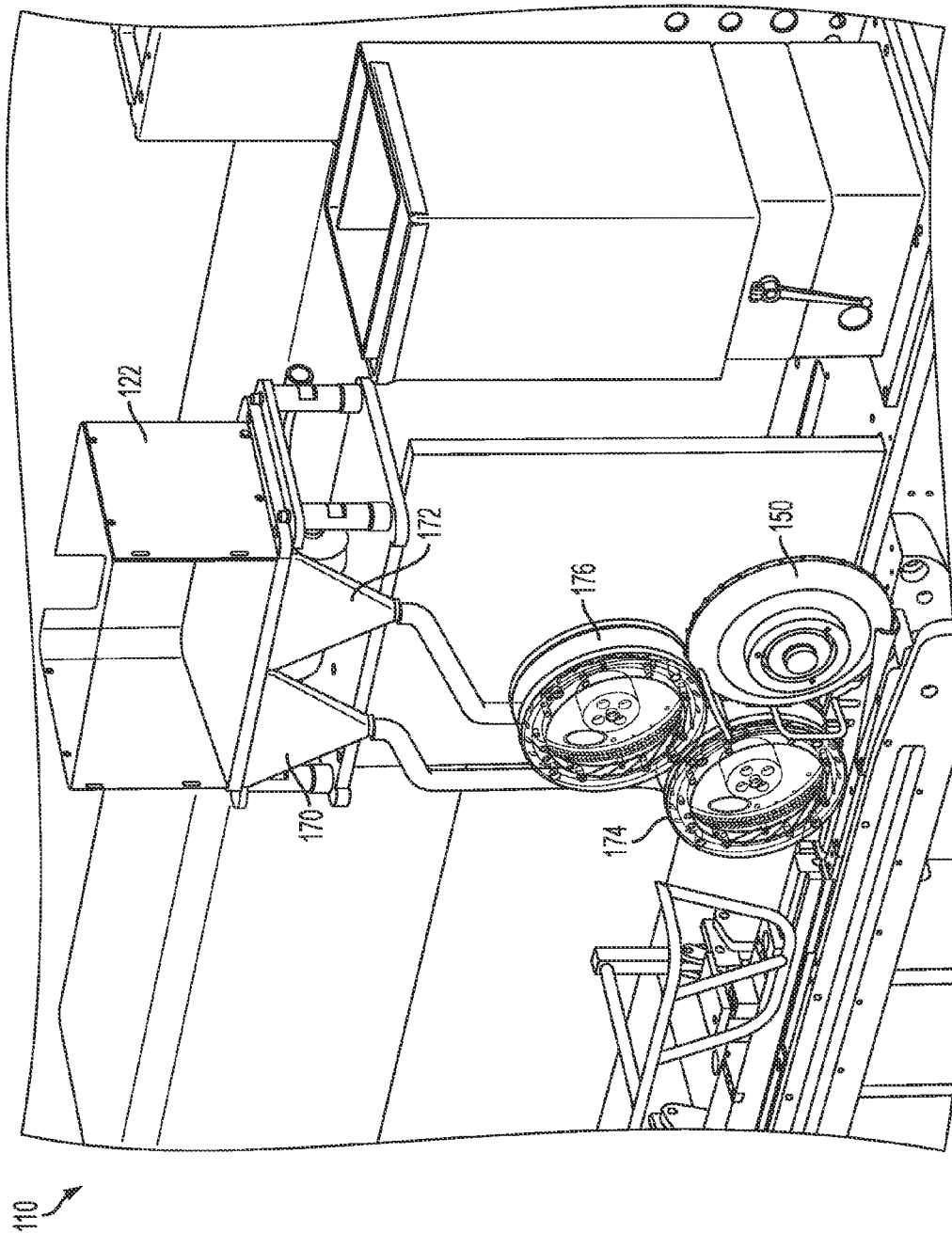
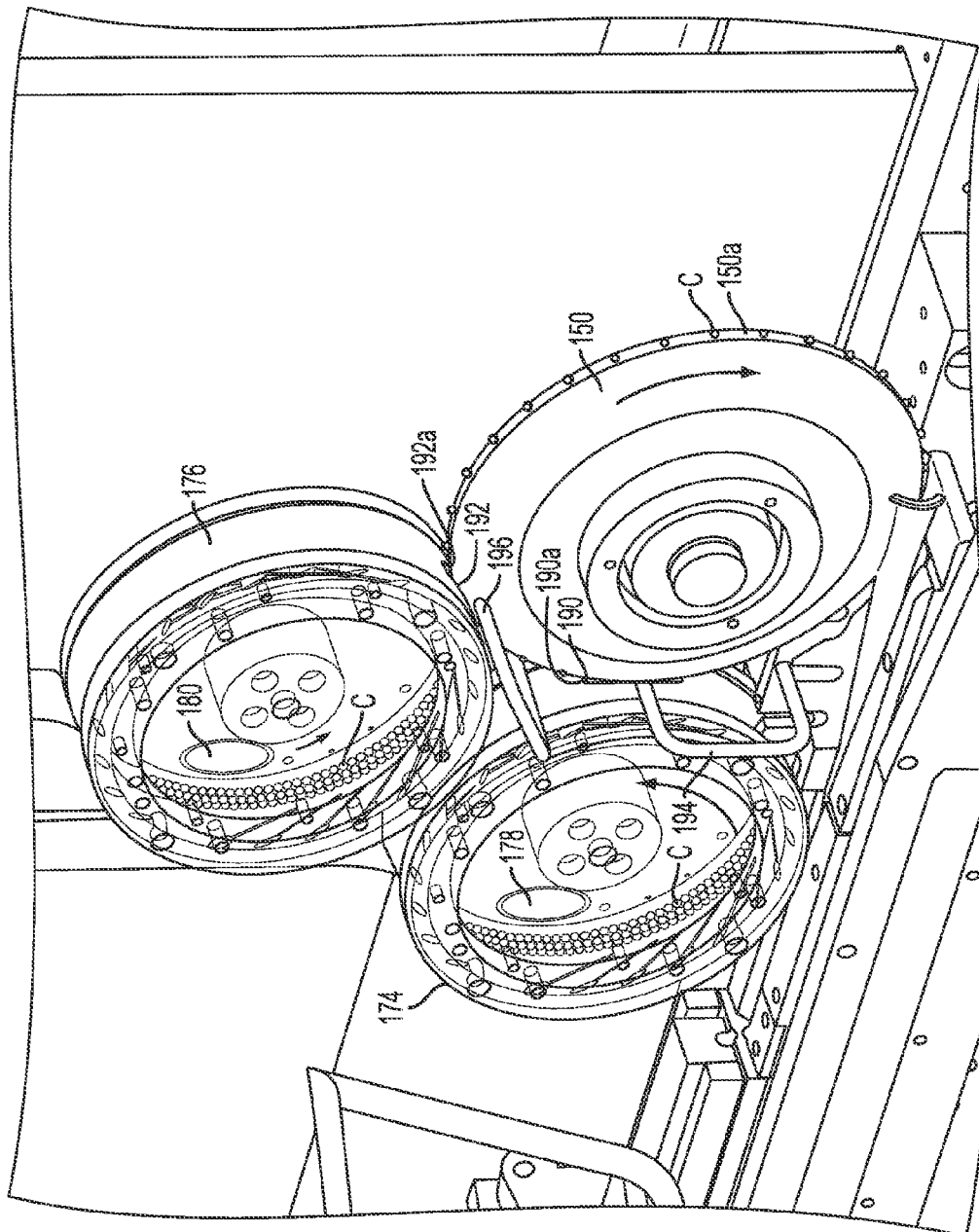


FIG. 7



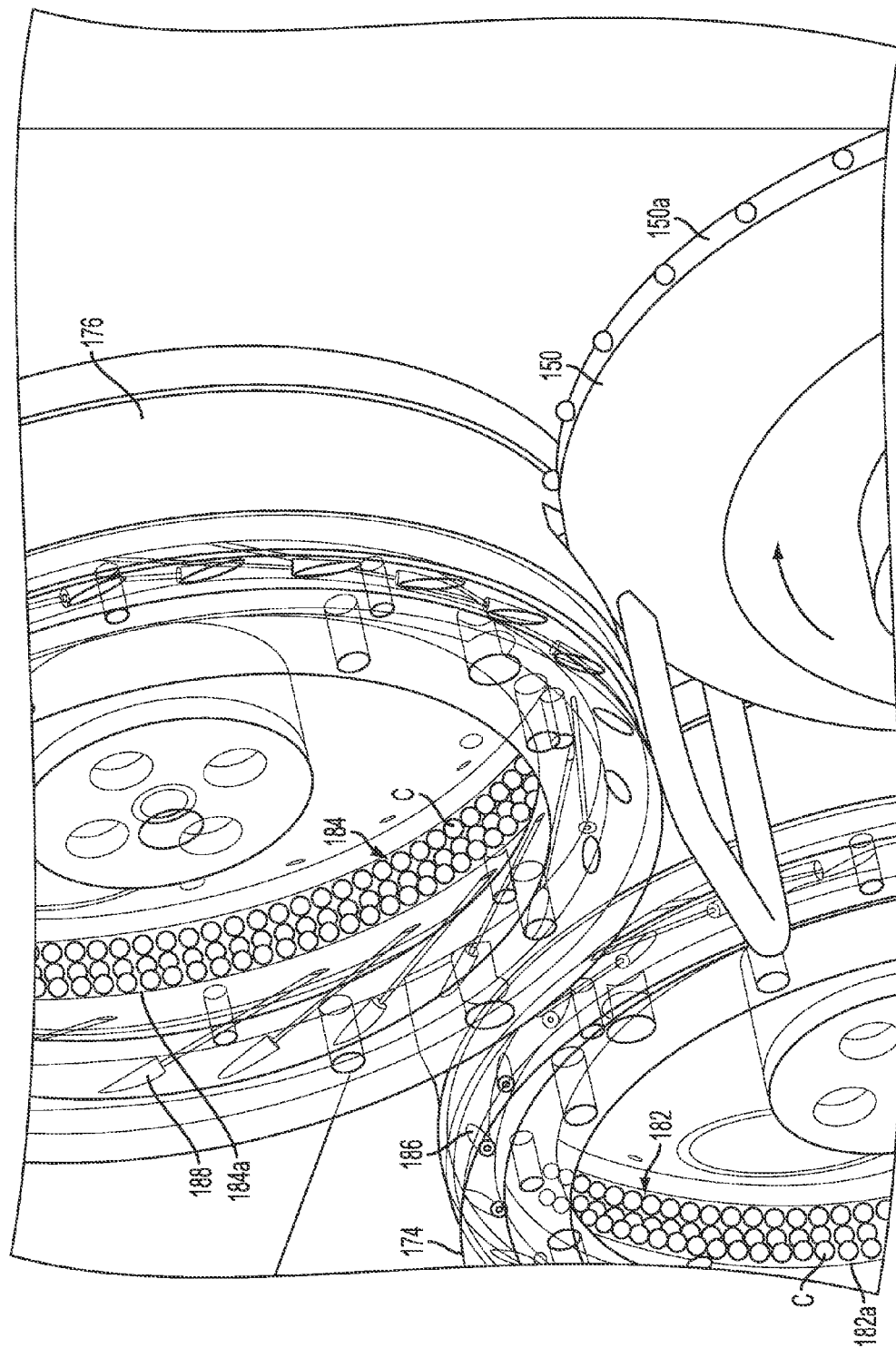


FIG. 9

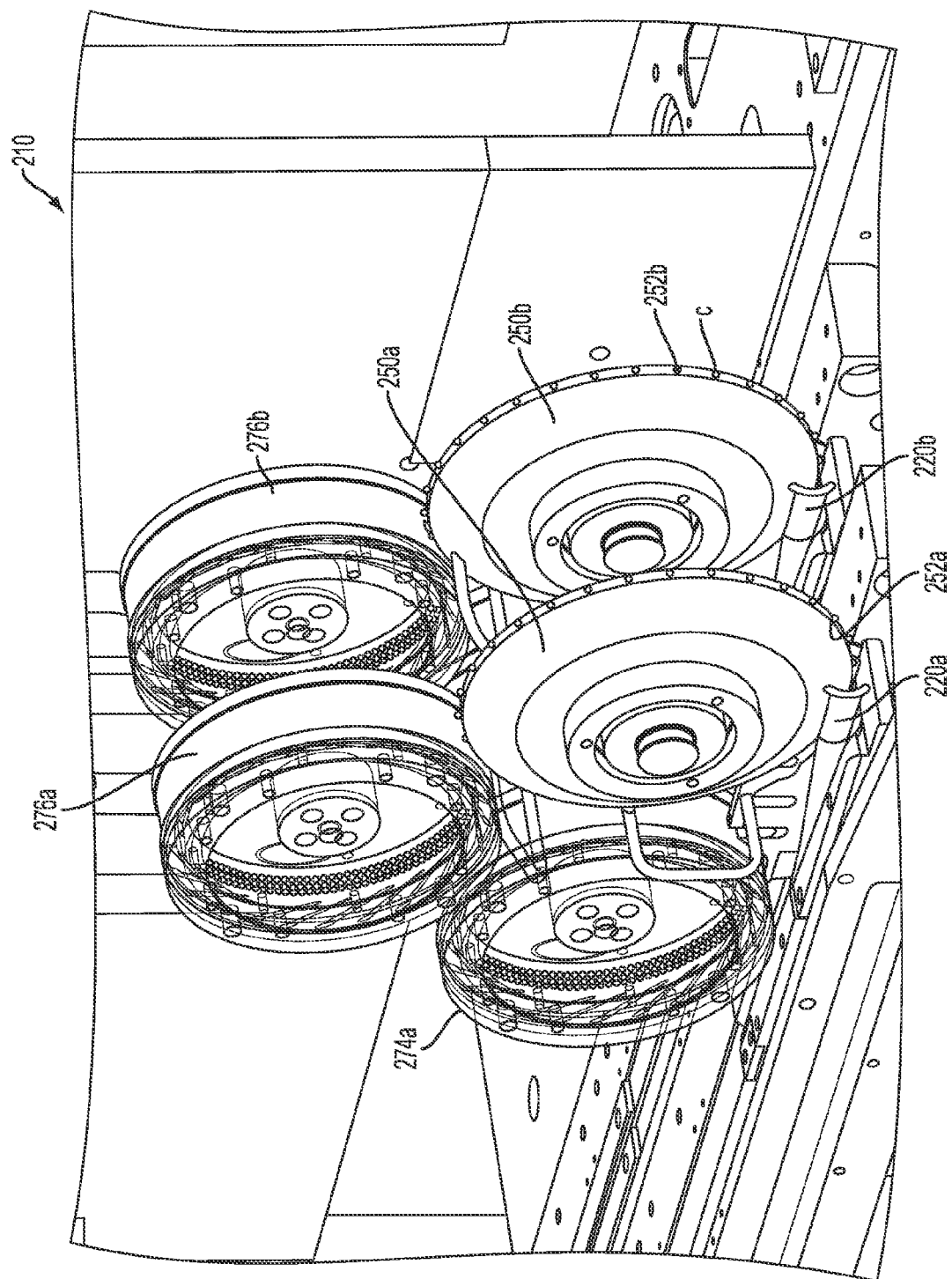


FIG. 10

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# HIGH SPEED OBJECT INSERTER AND RELATED METHODS

## CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This patent application is a continuation-in-part of Applicant's co-pending U.S. application Ser. No. 13/071,945, filed on Mar. 25, 2011, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

## TECHNICAL FIELD

This patent application relates generally to apparatuses and methods for manufacturing tobacco products. More specifically, this patent application relates to apparatuses and methods for inserting objects, such as capsules, into the filter component of tobacco products.

## BACKGROUND

International Publication No. WO 2010/107756, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, describes an apparatus and associated method for forming a rod for use in the manufacture of cigarette filter elements. A continuous supply of a filter material is formed into a continuous filter rod by a rod-forming unit. An object insertion unit is configured to insert a plurality of first objects and a plurality of second objects into the continuous filter rod. A rod-dividing unit is configured to subdivide the continuous filter rod, at predetermined intervals along the longitudinal axis thereof, into a plurality of filter rod portions such that each filter rod portion includes at least one first object and at least one second object disposed therein, with the first objects being different from the second objects.

International Publication No. WO 2010/055120, which is also incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, describes an apparatus for introducing objects into a smoking article comprising a reservoir for providing a plurality of objects to be introduced into the smoking article, a rotatable wheel for delivering the objects to the location where the objects are to be introduced into the smoking article, a transfer chamber for transferring the objects to the rotatable wheel, the transfer chamber being arranged between the reservoir and the rotatable wheel and being designed such that the objects are aligned into a single vertically arranged layer therein, and means for moving the objects from the single layer in the transfer chamber in a direction towards or along the peripheral surface of the rotatable wheel.

Due to the structure and function of these and other apparatuses known in the prior art, they are typically capable of operating at less than desired rod speeds, for example, at maximum rod speeds of approximately 85 meters per minute.

## SUMMARY

According to an embodiment, an apparatus for inserting one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod comprises: at least one storage apparatus that stores a plurality of the objects, each object having a predetermined volume; and at least one inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the storage apparatus, and inserts the objects into at least one band of filter material, each of the at least one inserter wheels having an outer periphery with a plurality of pockets defined in the outer periphery and distributed about the outer periphery; wherein each pocket has a shape configured to support one of the objects with between about one quarter and

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about one half of the volume of the object received in the pocket, and the remainder of the volume of the object protruding from the pocket above the outer periphery of the inserter wheel.

5 The apparatus can further comprise a first tongue that compresses a first band of filter material into a substantially cylindrical shape; and a second tongue that compresses a second band of filter material into a substantially cylindrical shape, the first tongue and the second tongue adapted to guide the first and second bands of filter material along substantially parallel paths; wherein the at least one inserter wheel comprises a first inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the at least storage apparatus and inserts the objects into the first band of filter material, and a second inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the at least one storage apparatus and inserts the objects into the second band of filter material. According to an embodiment, the first tongue and the second tongue are substantially conical and each include a slot adapted to receive a portion of the respective inserter wheel. According to an embodiment, the first tongue and the second tongue each define a diameter in a region where the first and second inserter wheels deposit the objects, and the first and second inserter wheels are each adapted to deposit the objects into the respective first and second bands of filter material to a depth equal to about one half of each tongue's diameter.

According to an embodiment, the first inserter wheel and second inserter wheel are substantially parallel to one another. According to an embodiment, each pocket in the first and second inserter wheels has a shape configured to support one of the objects with about one third of the volume of the object received in the pocket, and the remainder of the volume of the object protruding from the pocket above the outer periphery of the respective inserter wheel.

The apparatus can further comprise a first transfer chamber that transfers the objects from the at least one storage apparatus to the first inserter wheel, wherein the first transfer chamber includes an inner periphery; and a second transfer chamber substantially parallel to the first transfer chamber, wherein the second transfer chamber transfers the objects from the at least one storage apparatus to the second inserter wheel, wherein the second transfer chamber includes an inner periphery; and a source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner peripheries of the first transfer chamber and the second transfer chamber. According to an embodiment, the source of air comprises: a first source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner periphery of the first transfer chamber; and a second source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner periphery of the second transfer chamber. According to an embodiment, the first and second transfer chambers each include an object track defined in the respective inner periphery. According to an embodiment, the first and second transfer chambers each include parallel upper and lower transfer chambers that deliver the objects to alternating pockets in the respective first and second inserter wheels.

The apparatus can further comprise at least one source of air associated with the plurality of pockets in the first and second inserter wheels, wherein the at least one source of air applies a vacuum on the pockets to draw the objects into the pockets during transportation to the filter material, and the at least one source of air blows out of the pockets to eject the objects upon delivery into the filter material.

This patent application also relates to a method of inserting one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod, the method comprising: conveying substantially parallel first and second bands of filter material; supporting a plurality of the objects in pockets defined on the outer periphery of sub-

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stantially parallel first and second inserter wheels, with between about one quarter and about one half of the volume of each object received in the respective pocket; and delivering the objects into the parallel first and second bands of filter material from the respective first and second inserter wheels.

The method can further comprise compressing the first and second bands of filter material into substantially parallel first and second filter rods using substantially parallel first and second tongues. According to an embodiment, the filter material defines a diameter, and the step of delivering the objects into the first and second bands of filter material comprises inserting the objects to a depth of approximately one half of the filter material's diameter. According to an embodiment, inserting the objects to a depth of approximately one half of the filter material's diameter comprises supporting the objects in the pockets until they reach the depth of approximately one half of the filter material's diameter.

The method can further comprise supplying the objects to substantially parallel first and second transfer chambers located proximate the first and second inserter wheels, respectively; and accelerating the objects around inner peripheries of the first and second transfer chambers using forced air. According to an embodiment, each of the first and second transfer chambers comprises an upper transfer chamber and a lower transfer chamber.

The method can further comprise applying suction to one of the pockets to retain the object in the pocket prior to complete insertion of the object into the filter material; and blowing air out of the pocket upon complete insertion of the object into the filter material to eject the object from the pocket.

Further aspects, objectives, and advantages, as well as the structure and function of exemplary embodiments, will become apparent from a consideration of the description, drawings, and examples.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing aspects and other features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following drawings, wherein like reference numbers generally indicate identical, functionally similar, and/or structurally similar elements.

FIG. 1 is a side view of an object inserter according a first embodiment;

FIG. 2 is a side, perspective view of an inserter wheel, pitch wheels, metering wheels, and other components of the object inserter of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged view of a portion of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a side, schematic representation of a portion of the inserter wheel of FIG. 1, showing an object supported by a pocket in the inserter wheel;

FIG. 5 is a side, perspective view of a portion of an inserter wheel and a tongue of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 6 is another side, perspective view of a portion of an inserter wheel and a tongue of FIG. 1;

FIG. 7 is a side, perspective view of an object inserter according to a second embodiment;

FIG. 8 is a side, perspective view of an inserter wheel, acceleration chambers, and other components of the object inserter of FIG. 7;

FIG. 9 is an enlarged view of a portion of FIG. 8; and

FIG. 10 is a side, perspective view of an alternative version of the object inserter of FIG. 7, including two substantially parallel inserter wheels that operate in conjunction with two substantially parallel bands of filter material.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments of the invention are discussed in detail below. In describing embodiments, specific terminology is

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employed for the sake of clarity. However, the invention is not intended to be limited to the specific terminology so selected. A person skilled in the relevant art will recognize that other equivalent parts can be employed and other methods developed without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. All references cited herein are incorporated by reference as if each had been individually incorporated.

The present invention relates to apparatuses and methods that can be used to insert objects into a smoking article, such as the apparatuses described in International Publication Nos. WO 2010/107756 A1 and WO 2010/055120 A1, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference. The apparatuses and methods of the present invention can be used to insert objects into a component of a smoking article, such as the filter material. By way of example, the objects can be beads, capsules, or pellets, however, other types of objects are also possible. The objects may be used, for example, to enhance the sensory attributes of cigarette smoke. In particular, the objects can be used as vehicles for adding flavor or other substances to the mainstream smoke. Exemplary types of filter material that can be used with the present invention include cellulose acetate tow, gathered cellulose acetate web, polypropylene tow, gathered paper, strands of reconstituted tobacco, and the like.

Referring to FIG. 1, an exemplary object inserter 10 is shown. According to an embodiment, object inserter 10 can be located upstream (to the right in FIG. 1) of a conventional rod-forming unit (not shown). Filter material can be processed using a filter material processing unit 12 (e.g., a transport jet) and passed through the rod-forming unit to form a continuous rod. The object inserter 10 may be associated with the filter material processing unit 12 and/or with the rod-forming unit to insert one or more objects within the continuous length of filter material or the continuous filter rod. The continuous filter rod can then be subdivided using a rod cutting assembly (not shown) into a plurality of rod portions each having at least one object located therein. The rod portions can be collected for further processing in a collection device, for example, a tray, a rotary collection drum, a conveying system, or the like. According to an embodiment, the rod portions can then be transported directly to a cigarette making machine. Various aspects of the object inserter 10 described herein allow operation at higher speeds than prior art object inserters.

Still referring to FIG. 1, the filter material processing unit 12 can meter a continuous band of the filter material (e.g., filter tow) from a pair of delivery rollers 14a, 14b to a gathering roller 16 associated with the object inserter 10. According to an embodiment, the gathering roller 16 can define a circumferential profile that pre-folds the band of filter material to better facilitate object insertion. For example, the gathering roller 16 can define a substantially U-shaped or V-shaped circumferential profile that bends or folds the filter material as it passes over the gathering roller 16, however, other configurations are possible.

The gathering roller 16 can feed the filter material to a tow guide 18, and then to a downstream tongue 20, as best seen in FIGS. 2, 5, and 6. After exiting the tongue 20; the filter material passes through the remainder of the rod-forming unit (not shown). Further details of the tow guide 18 and tongue 20 are discussed in detail below.

Referring back to FIG. 1, the object inserter 10 can include a storage apparatus 22, such as one or more hoppers, that stores a plurality of the objects to be inserted into the filter material. According to an embodiment, the objects can be substantially spherical in shape, and may be referred to as capsules, however, other shapes and configurations are pos-

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sible. For ease of discussion, the objects will be referred to generally as “capsules” herein.

According to an embodiment, the storage apparatus **22** can feed the capsules to one or more feed chambers **24**, **26**, which in turn feed the capsules to first and second metering wheels **28**, **30**. According to an embodiment, the feed chamber **24** and/or the feed chamber **26** comprises a “single plane” feed chamber that feeds only a single plane of capsules to the periphery of the respective metering wheels **28**, **30**. For example, the capsules passing through the “single plane” feed chamber can be confined to an arrangement that is multiple capsules high, and multiple capsules deep, but only a single capsule wide. According to an alternative embodiment, not shown, the storage apparatus **22** can feed the capsules to one feed chamber, instead of two as shown, and the feed chamber can in turn feed the capsules to a single, or multiple, metering wheels. The storage apparatus **22** and/or the feed chambers **24**, **26** can include vibrators or similar devices to assist in moving the capsules from the storage apparatus **22** to the metering wheels **28**, **30**.

Referring to FIGS. **2** and **3**, the metering wheels **28**, **30** are shown in more detail. The metering wheels **28**, **30** each define an outer periphery **28a**, **30a**, a portion of which is located in registry with the lower exit ports **24a**, **26a** of the feed chambers **24**, **26**, respectively. See FIG. **2**. The outer peripheries **28a**, **30a** can each define a set of metering wheel pockets **32**, **34**, which are distributed equidistantly about the respective outer peripheries **28a**, **30a**. The metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** are adapted to receive the capsules from the lower exit ports **24a**, **26a** of the feed chambers **24**, **26**, and to transport the capsules at least partially within the metering wheels **28**, **30**.

According to an embodiment, the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** can be substantially cylindrical in shape, and can define a diameter and depth sufficient to receive all or a portion of the respective capsules. In the case of a cylindrical shape, the pockets can have a depth and diameter that are the same or slightly larger than the diameter of the respective capsules, in order to ensure precise positioning of the capsules within the pockets. According to alternative embodiments, the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** can be square, rectangular, conical, or other shapes known in the art, provided the pockets can securely and precisely receive and transport all or a portion of the respective capsules. A source of vacuum (not shown) can be applied to the pockets **32**, **34** to aid in transfer of the capsules from the feed chambers **24**, **26**, and/or to aid in retention of the capsules within the pockets **32**, **34** once there.

Still referring to FIGS. **2** and **3**, the apparatus **10** can include intermediate wheels **36**, **38** that receive capsules transferred from the metering wheels **28**, **30**. Referring to FIG. **3**, the intermediate wheels **36**, **38** can each define an outer periphery **36a**, **38a**, which can each define a set of intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** distributed equidistantly about the respective outer peripheries **36a**, **38a**. The intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** are adapted to receive the capsules from the metering wheels **28**, **30**, and to transport the capsules at least partially within the intermediate wheels **36**, **38**. The intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** can be substantially the same as the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** described above, and won't be described in further detail herein. A source of vacuum (not shown) can be applied to the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** to aid in transfer of the capsules from the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** to the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42**, and/or to aid in retention of the capsules within the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** once there.

Referring to FIG. **3**, a first metering guide **44** can be located between the first metering wheel **28** and the first intermediate

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wheel **36**. Similarly, a second metering guide **46** can be located between the second metering wheel **30** and the second intermediate wheel **42**. The metering guides **44**, **46** can aid in the transfer of capsules between the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** and the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42**, respectively. For example, the first metering guide **44** can cover or block a portion of the first intermediate wheel pockets **32** as well as a portion of the first metering wheel pockets **40** until the time, or shortly before, a metering wheel pocket **32** comes into registry with a respective intermediate wheel pocket **40**. The second metering guide **46** can have a similar arrangement.

For the metering wheel pockets that are covered by the metering guides **44**, **46**, the source of vacuum that is normally applied to the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** can be turned off and/or substituted with a jet of air directed out of the covered metering wheel pockets **32**, **34**. Once one of the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** rotates past the metering guide **44**, **46**, and is no longer blocked thereby, the jet of air may propel the capsule out of that metering wheel pocket and into the intermediate wheel pocket **40**, **42** that is in registry therewith at that point in time. As a result, the metering guides **44**, **46** can allow the jet of air that blasts the capsules out of the pockets to be applied earlier than if there were no metering guides **44**, **46**, without the risk of prematurely ejecting the capsules from the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34**. Accordingly, the speed and consistency at which capsules are transferred from the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34** to the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** can be improved.

Still referring to FIGS. **2** and **3**, the apparatus **10** can include an inserter wheel **50** that receives capsules from the intermediate wheels **36**, **38** and inserts them into the band of filter material, for example, as it passes through the tongue **20** of the rod-forming unit. The inserter wheel **50** can define an outer periphery **50a** having a plurality of inserter wheel pockets **52** distributed equidistantly about the outer periphery **50a**. The inserter wheel pockets **52** at least partially receive the capsules and support them on the inserter wheel **50**, as will be described in more detail below. A source of vacuum (not shown) can be applied to the inserter wheel pockets **52** to aid in transfer of the capsules from the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** to the inserter wheel pockets **52**, and/or to aid in retention of the capsules within the intermediate wheel pockets **52** once there.

The arrangement of the metering wheels **28**, **30**, intermediate wheels **36**, **38**, and inserter wheel **50** described above can help facilitate faster operation of the object inserter **10**. For example, the metering wheels **28**, **30** can operate at a relatively low speed (e.g., measured at the outer peripheries **28a**, **30a**) to ensure consistent transfer of the capsules from the feed chambers **24**, **26** to the respective metering wheel pockets **32**, **34**. Simultaneously, the inserter wheel **50** can insert the capsules into the filter material at a high delivery speed, for a fast production rate.

According to an embodiment, a pitch increase and speed increase can occur upon transfer from the metering wheels **28**, **30** to the intermediate wheels **36**, **38**. For example, according to an embodiment, the first and second intermediate wheels **36**, **38** can rotate faster than the respective metering wheels **28**, **30**. Additionally or alternatively, the intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** can be arranged at a greater pitch than the metering wheel pockets **32**, **34**.

According to an embodiment, faster speeds can be provided by alternately transferring capsules from the first and second intermediate wheel pockets **40**, **42** to the inserter wheel pockets **52**. For example, an intermediate wheel pocket **40** in the first intermediate wheel **36** can transfer a capsule to

an inserter wheel pocket **52**, and subsequently an intermediate wheel pocket **42** in the second intermediate wheel **38** can transfer a capsule to the immediate next inserter wheel pocket **52**, and so on. A pitch increase and/or a speed increase can also occur upon transfer from the intermediate wheels **36, 38** to the inserter wheel **50**. According to an embodiment, the first intermediate wheel **36**, second intermediate wheel **38**, and inserter wheel **50** can rotate at substantially the same speed, although other configurations are possible. For example, the inserter wheel **50** could alternatively rotate faster or slower than the first and second intermediate wheels **36, 38**.

The following table lists exemplary parameters for operation of an object inserter **10**:

TABLE A

Wheel Set	Holes/ Wheel	Wheel Dia. (mm)	Operating RPM	Surface speed
Metering Wheels	30 each	137.5	133⅓	57.6 M/min
Intermediate Wheels	10 each	95	400	119.38 M/min
Inserter Wheels	20	190	400	238.76 M/min

When used to form 108 mm filter rods having four capsules per filter, an embodiment of object inserter **10** using the above parameters resulted in a machine speed of approximately 216 meters of filter material per minute, for an output of 2,000 filters per minute (8,000 capsules per minute). One of ordinary skill in the art will recognize from this description that other parameters than those described above can be used.

Although the embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-6 has two metering wheels **28, 30** and two intermediate wheels **36, 38**, one of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate based on this description that alternative embodiments may employ a single metering wheel and/or a single intermediate wheel. Likewise, one of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate based on this description that alternative embodiments may have more than two metering wheels and/or more than two intermediate wheels. Furthermore, while the embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-6 includes two feed chambers **24, 26**, one of ordinary skill in the art will understand based on this description that a single feed chamber, or more than two feed chambers, may be used.

Referring to FIG. 4, a portion of an inserter wheel **50** having an inserter wheel pocket **52** is shown in detail. The object inserter **10** can be designed to operate with a capsule C having a predetermined shape and volume. For ease of description, the invention will be described in connection with a spherical capsule C, however, as mentioned previously, other shapes and sizes of capsules are possible.

In order to facilitate accurate placement of the capsule C in the filter material, the inserter wheel pocket **52** can support the capsule C such that a portion C1 of the capsule C, for example, between about one quarter and about one half of the capsule's volume, resides inside the pocket **52**, with the remainder C2 of the capsule C protruding from the pocket **52** above the outer periphery **50a** of the inserter wheel **50**. As a result, the inserter wheel **50** can manually insert the capsule to substantially its desired position within the filter material, without having to rely on forced air to "shoot" the capsule C out of a deep pocket and to its desired position, resulting in higher control and accuracy in placing the capsule C, and/or allowing for higher operating speeds.

As shown in FIG. 4, for cylindrical capsules C, the inserter wheel pocket **52** can be shaped as a portion of a sphere, however, other configurations of the pocket **52** are possible. For example, the inserter wheel pocket can comprise a plurality of discreet surfaces that contact and support different points on the surface of the capsule C (e.g., a cylindrical pocket may be dimensioned to receive and support a portion of a spherical capsule C). According to an embodiment, the inserter wheel pockets **52** are configured to receive and support approximately one third of the total volume of the capsule C, with the remainder of each capsule's volume protruding from the inserter wheel pocket **52** and above the outer periphery **50a** of the inserter wheel.

Referring to FIGS. 5 and 6, an embodiment is shown where the inserter wheel **50** inserts the capsules C directly into the tongue **20** of the rod forming unit. As shown, the tongue **20** can comprise a substantially conical shaped wall that compresses the band of filter material as it is drawn through the tongue **20**, causing the filter material to take on a cylindrical shape. A slot **60** can extend through the conical wall along the direction of movement of the filter material, and portion of the inserter wheel **50** can extend through the slot **60** into the interior of the tongue **20**. As a result of this configuration, the inserter wheel **50** can deposit the capsule C directly into the filter material as it is being compressed by the tongue **20**. By inserting the capsule C into the filter material as close to the rod formation point as reasonably possible, the capsule C may retain its desired position within the filter material.

Still referring to FIGS. 5 and 6, the inserter wheel pocket **52** can remain in contact and provide positive support to the capsule C until the capsule C is nearly or completely moved to the desired position within the filter material. For example, referring to FIG. 6, the conical wall of the tongue **20** may define an inner diameter D at the point where the capsule C is to be inserted into the filter material, and the tongue **20** may shape the filter material to have substantially the same diameter at that point. The inserter wheel **50** and inserter wheel pocket **52** may actively support the capsule C until the inserter wheel **50** positions the capsule C at a depth Y within the tongue **20**, shown in FIG. 5. According to an embodiment, the depth Y may be substantially one half of the diameter D of the tongue **20**, causing the capsule C to be deposited substantially centered within the filter material, however, other configurations are possible. Once the inserter wheel **50** and inserter wheel pocket **52** have moved the capsule to its desired position within the filter material, as shown in FIGS. 5 and 6, the vacuum that is normally applied to the inserter wheel pockets can be optionally switched to a short blast of positive air pressure, for example, to speed up the release of the capsule C from the respective inserter wheel pocket **52**.

According to an embodiment, the linear speed of the outer periphery **50a** of the inserter wheel **50**, and hence the inserter wheel pockets **52**, can be greater than the linear speed of the filter material through the tongue **20**. This arrangement can result in greater accuracy in placing the capsules C in the filter material.

Still referring to FIGS. 5 and 6, a tow guide **62** and rod-shaped plow **64** can be located upstream of the tongue **20**. The tow guide **62** can define a substantially conical or substantially cylindrical inner space. The plow **64** can extend longitudinally within the tow guide **62** and, together with the plow **64**, can pre-form or pre-fold the filter material into a substantial C-shape or U-shape prior to entering the tongue **20**. As a result of the substantial C-shape or U-shape pre-forming of the filter material, the inserter wheel **50** can insert the capsule C through the opening in the C-shaped or U-shaped filter material, and into the approximate center of the folded filter



material. As a consequence of this configuration, the folded filter material may more reliably hold the capsule C in its desired position within the filter material and resulting filter. According to an embodiment, the position of the plow 64 can be adjusted with respect to the tow guide 62, for example, along the longitudinal axis of the tow guide 62.

Referring to FIGS. 7-9, a second embodiment of an object inserter is shown. For purposes of this description, the object inserter 110 of FIGS. 7-9 differs from the object inserter 10 shown in FIGS. 1-6 only in the structure and function of delivering the objects (e.g., capsules) from the storage apparatus 122 to the inserter wheel 150. Accordingly, for ease of explanation, discussion of structures and functions that are the same as, or substantially similar to, the embodiment of FIGS. 1-6 will be not be repeated.

Referring to FIG. 7, the object inserter 110 can generally include first and second gravity feeders 170, 172 that feed the capsules from the storage apparatus 122 to first and second transfer chambers 174, 176, respectively. Although not shown, shutters, valves, or other metering devices can be used to meter the flow of capsules from the storage apparatus 122 to the first and second transfer chambers 174, 176, respectively, as will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art based on this description. Although the embodiment shown in FIG. 7 has two gravity feeders 170, 172 and two transfer chambers 174, 176, one of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate based on this description that alternative embodiments may employ only a single gravity feeder and a single transfer chamber, or alternatively, more than two gravity feeders and more than two transfer chambers.

Referring to FIG. 8, the first and second transfer chambers 174, 176 and inserter wheel 150 are shown in more detail. The first and second transfer chambers 174, 176 can be adapted to accelerate the capsules C to a speed that is substantially equal to the linear speed of the periphery 150a of the inserter wheel 150, and hence the inserter wheel pockets (not shown), to facilitate reliable and consistent transfer of the capsules C to the inserter wheel pockets when operating at high speed. To further facilitate high speed delivery of the capsules C by the inserter wheel 150, the first and second transfer chambers 174, 176 can take turns supplying a capsule C to alternating pockets 152 in the inserter wheel 150.

Referring to FIG. 8, the first and second gravity feeders 170, 172 can deliver a continuous supply of the capsules C to the interior of the first and second transfer chambers 174, 176, respectively, through inlet ports 178, 180. Each transfer chamber 174, 176 defines an inner peripheral surface 182, 184, shown in FIG. 9. In the embodiment of FIGS. 7-9, the inner peripheral surfaces 182, 184 are substantially circular, however other shapes are possible, for example, elliptical.

Referring to FIG. 9, the inner peripheral surfaces 182, 184 can define tracks 182a, 184a that guide the capsules C around the inner peripheral surfaces in a predetermined pattern. A plurality of air nozzles 186, 188, act on the capsules C located in the tracks 182a, 184a to accelerate the capsules C around the inner peripheral surfaces 182, 184 within the tracks 182a, 184a, respectively, until the capsules C reach a linear speed substantially equal to the linear speed of the inserter wheel pockets (not shown) on the inserter wheel 150.

Referring back to FIG. 8, each transfer chamber 174, 176 can include an exit 190, 192 (e.g., an elongated slot through the peripheral surfaces 182, 184) located along the tracks 182a, 184a. A portion of the outer periphery 150a of the inserter wheel 150 can extend through each exit 190, 192. The tracks 182a, 184a can be configured to guide the capsules C around the inner peripheral surfaces 182, 184, under the force of the air nozzles 186, 188, until the capsules C reach the

respective exit 190, 192. Upon reaching the respective exit 190, 192, the capsule C may be at the same or similar linear speed as the outer periphery 150a of the inserter wheel 150, and will transition into an inserter wheel pocket (not shown) on the inserter wheel 150. Vacuum force applied to the inserter wheel pocket may assist with the transfer and retention of the capsule C into the inserter wheel pocket. In addition, according to an embodiment, a brush (not shown) may be located inside each transfer chamber 174, 176 at the trailing edge 190a, 192a of each exit 190, 192 to aid in transfer of the capsules C to the inserter wheel pockets. In addition, air nozzles 194, 196 may direct an air curtain at each exit 190, 192, respectively, to protect the respective exit 190, 192, and/or to blow away extra capsules C that may erroneously pass through the exit 190, 192.

Referring to FIG. 10, a third embodiment of an object inserter is shown. For purposes of this description, the object inserter 210 of FIG. 10 differs from the object inserter 110 shown in FIGS. 7-9 primarily in that it includes two or more substantially parallel inserter wheels 250a, 250b and related feed components mounted to a common base. The arrangement of substantially parallel inserter wheels 250a, 250b allows capsules to be inserted into two or more substantially parallel bands of filter material, however non-parallel embodiments are also possible. For ease of explanation, discussion of structures and functions that are the same as, or substantially similar to, the embodiment of FIGS. 1-9 will be not be repeated. In addition, while the concept of an integrated object inserter for inserting capsules into two or more substantially parallel bands of filter material is described herein with respect to the embodiment of FIGS. 7-9, the same multi-line feature can be applied using the structures shown in FIGS. 1-6.

As mentioned above, the object inserter 210 of FIG. 10 can include two substantially parallel inserter wheels 250a, 250b, each of which may have the same or similar configuration as the inserter wheels described in connection with FIGS. 1-9. For example, each inserter wheel 250a, 250b can include inserter wheel pockets 252a, 252b adapted to support a capsule C such that a portion of the capsule C, for example, between about one quarter and about one half of the capsule's volume, resides inside the pocket 252a, 252b, with the remainder of the capsule C protruding from the pocket 252a, 252b above the outer periphery of the respective inserter wheel 250a, 250b, as previously described herein. According to an embodiment, the inserter wheel pockets 252a, 252b can be configured to receive and support approximately one third of the total volume of the capsule C, with the remainder of each capsule's volume protruding from the inserter wheel pocket 252a, 252b and above the outer periphery of the respective inserter wheel 250a, 250b.

The inserter wheels 250a, 250b can insert the capsules C into substantially parallel bands of filter material, for example, that are transported through substantially parallel tongues 220a, 220b. The tongues 220a, 220b can have the same or similar configurations as the tongue 20 previously described and shown, for example, in FIGS. 1, 2, 5, and 6.

As shown in FIG. 10, each inserter wheel 250a, 250b can be fed capsules from one or more transfer chambers. For example, an upper transfer chamber 276a and a lower transfer chamber 274a can feed inserter wheel 250a, and an upper transfer chamber 276b and a lower transfer chamber 274b (hidden from view) can feed the inserter wheel 250b, as shown and described in connection with FIGS. 7-9. According to an alternative embodiment, not specifically shown, the inserter wheels 250a, 250b can be fed capsules from substantially parallel arrangements of metering wheel 28, metering

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wheel 30, intermediate wheel 36, and intermediate wheel 38, for example, as shown and described in connection with FIGS. 1-3.

A single hopper (not shown) can supply capsules to all of the substantially parallel inserter wheels 250a, 250b. Alternatively, a separate hopper (not shown) can supply capsules to each of the inserter wheels 250a, 250b, or to a subset of the inserter wheels. The object inserter 210 is not limited to two substantially parallel arrangements of inserter wheels 250a, 250b, as shown in FIG. 10, but alternatively, can have as many substantially parallel configurations as desired, for example, to meet output needs.

The structures and operations discussed above can be utilized in methods to insert one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod, as will be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art based on this description. The structures and operations can be utilized to insert the objects into a single band of filter material, or alternatively, into multiple, substantially parallel bands. As mentioned previously, the structures and operations described herein can result in a significant increase in speed and reliability as compared to prior art apparatuses and methods. For example, the apparatus shown in FIGS. 1-6 has been operated with the parameters listed in Table A, above, to form a single line of 108 mm filter rods having four capsules per filter, at a rate of approximately 216 meters of filter material per minute per line (output of 2,000 filters per minute), and with high consistency and reliability. This output speed is dramatically faster than what is possible with prior art machines, which have typically been limited to speeds of approximately 80 meters per minute to reliably produce similar filter rods. One of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate from this description that the parameters listed in Table A can be varied to provide similar high output speeds to prepare filter rods having different configurations.

The embodiments illustrated and discussed in this specification are intended only to teach those skilled in the art the best way known to the inventors to make and use the invention. Nothing in this specification should be considered as limiting the scope of the present invention. All examples presented are representative and non-limiting. The above-described embodiments of the invention may be modified or varied, without departing from the invention, as appreciated by those skilled in the art in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that, within the scope of the claims and their equivalents, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

The invention claimed is:

1. An apparatus for inserting one or more objects into a filter component of a tobacco rod, the apparatus comprising:
  - at least one storage apparatus that stores a plurality of the objects, each object having a predetermined volume;
  - at least one inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the storage apparatus, and inserts the objects into at least one band of filter material, each of the at least one inserter wheels having an outer periphery with a plurality of pockets defined in the outer periphery and distributed about the outer periphery;
- wherein each pocket has a shape configured to support one of the objects with between about one quarter and about one half of the volume of the object received in the pocket, and the remainder of the volume of the object protruding from the pocket above the outer periphery of the inserter wheel;
- a first tongue that compresses a first band of filter material into a substantially cylindrical shape;

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a second tongue that compresses a second band of filter material into a substantially cylindrical shape, the first tongue and the second tongue adapted to guide the first and second bands of filter material along substantially parallel paths;

wherein the at least one inserter wheel comprises a first inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the at least one storage apparatus and inserts the objects into the first band of filter material, and a second inserter wheel that receives the objects stored in the at least one storage apparatus and inserts the objects into the second band of filter material;

further wherein the first tongue and the second tongue each define a diameter in a region where the first and second inserter wheels deposit the objects, and the first and second inserter wheels are each adapted to deposit the objects into the respective first and second bands of filter material to a depth equal to about one half of each tongue's diameter.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first tongue and the second tongue are substantially conical and each include a slot adapted to receive a portion of the respective inserter wheel.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first inserter wheel and second inserter wheel are substantially parallel to one another.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein each pocket in the first and second inserter wheels has a shape configured to support one of the objects with about one third of the volume of the object received in the pocket, and the remainder of the volume of the object protruding from the pocket above the outer periphery of the respective inserter wheel.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

a first transfer chamber that transfers the objects from the at least one storage apparatus to the first inserter wheel, wherein the first transfer chamber includes an inner periphery;

a second transfer chamber substantially parallel to the first transfer chamber, wherein the second transfer chamber transfers the objects from the at least one storage apparatus to the second inserter wheel, wherein the second transfer chamber includes an inner periphery;

a source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner peripheries of the first transfer chamber and the second transfer chamber.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the source of air comprises:

a first source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner periphery of the first transfer chamber; and

a second source of air that accelerates the objects around the inner periphery of the second transfer chamber.

7. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the first and second transfer chambers each include an object track defined in the respective inner periphery.

8. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the first and second transfer chambers each include substantially parallel upper and lower transfer chambers that deliver the objects to alternating pockets in the respective first and second inserter wheels.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising at least one source of air associated with the plurality of pockets in the first and second inserter wheels, wherein the at least one source of air applies a vacuum on the pockets to draw the objects into the pockets during transportation to the filter material, and the at least one source of air blows out of the pockets to eject the objects upon delivery into the filter material.

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**10.** The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the objects comprise substantially spherical capsules.

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